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THE BREAKING NET.

A SERMON

PREACHED ON THE OCCASION OF THE

MEETING OF THE CHURCH CONGRESS,

AT

St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin,

ON

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 1868.

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BY W. C. MAGEE, D. D.,

DEAN OF CORK AND OF THE CHAPEL ROYAL, DUBLIN.

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A SERMON.

"And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them."—LUKE, v. 7.

THE Church of Christ, in this prophetic picture of her future, is seen passing through the two great trials of her life on earth—the trial of failure and the trial of success. As the first scene of this miracle opens on us, we see the disciples wearied with their long and fruitless labour. They have toiled all night—toiled, that is, under the most favourable circumstances—toiled long and earnestly, and have caught nothing. As the second scene of the miracle closes, we see the same disciples embarrassed by a sudden and vast success. The multitude of fishes they have enclosed is so great that it threatens to break their net, and they beckon to their partners for help.

We know how constantly these two trials alternate through all the history of the Church. How often in her history has there arisen from the fishers of men, worn with toil, disheartened with failure, the cry—"we have toiled all night and have caught nothing;" and we know, too, how often their perseverance and faith have been rewarded by a great and unlooked-for success—success actually perilous from its very greatness and from the suddenness of its demand upon their strength and skill.

And there is another fact foreshadowed in this miracle which all will admit to have been realised in the history of the Church. It is, that the perils of this latter trial are greater than those of the former; that the Church has often more to fear in the hour of her success than in the hour of her failure. The danger of the night of fruitless toil is obvious. It is, that the disappointed workers should desert their work; that losing all heart and hope they should cease to cast the net. But even in that case, the net itself remains unbroken; it needs but reviving faith to use it again. But in the hour of successful capture it is the net itself that is threatened. Their danger is not now the delay of the work, but the loss of the fruits of it and the power of renewing it. All who know anything of Church history, or of Church work, know the truth of this. They know that the Church's hour of greatest peril has ever been, not that of her adversity, but that of her prosperity. They know how real, how serious, are the perils of success. They know how deep is the need for the Church as for the individual to pray ever the prayer, "In all time of our wealth good Lord deliver us."

So far then, the lessons of this miracle lie upon the surface of it. It teaches us just those two great lessons of warning and encouragement—of warning against carelessness, of encouragement against despondency—that all Scripture and all experience are ever teaching us. It says to us those two great words, which in some form or other Christ is ever saying to His Church, "My grace is sufficient for thee;" and, "What I say unto you I say unto all, watch!"

But there is another lesson in this miracle, not so apparent, and yet a very important one. It is this. That if the hour of success may be the hour of greatest peril, so on the other hand, the hour of greatest peril may be that of real success.

It is clear that in this narrative the danger arises out of the success of the disciples, is caused by it and is inseparable from it. The contrast between the two trials is, in this respect, very remarkable. The danger of the night was wholly

and exclusively a temptation. It was one, therefore, which it rested with themselves entirely to avoid; they need not cease to cast the net. But the danger in the other case arises quite independently of their course of action. It did not depend on them whether their net should be in danger of breaking, though it did depend on them whether it should be cast. That is to say, the peril in the latter case is inevitable, is to be reckoned on as sure to come with such success, and, therefore, is to be regarded, so far, as an indication of success, as a reason, therefore, if for anxiety, yet for thankfulness; a cause for rejoicing, even though they trembled while they rejoiced.

Now, if this be also a fact in the history of the Church—if there be really perils and trials which are actually the indications and tests of successful labour—then it is all-important to remember this fact whenever we attempt to estimate the present position and prospects of the Church of Christ, or of any branch of it. We must take care, in so doing, to distinguish between the dangers which are caused by our faults or neglects, and the dangers that actually arise from the very success of our labours; between the dangers that call for repentance and amendment and the dangers that call only for courage and wisdom; between evils which we must cure if we would exist, and evils which we can never cure so long as we exist—evils which in fact we could not get rid of without losing some greater accompanying good. To confound these together is a very serious error. Not merely because it often leads to needless fear and despondency, but because it often leads to misdirected and wasted effort, to setting ourselves to prevent the inevitable, to alter the unalterable, to change, not the manner of our working, but the essential and unchangeable conditions under which our Master has appointed that we shall work.

It may help us, then, brethren, on this occasion—when so many earnest workers for God are gathered together, to pass in review their labour and its results, to take counsel together on its duties and its difficulties and its dangers, to seek to dis-

cover their own shortcomings or errors in the doing of it—it may help us to a deeper and a truer estimate of all these; it may help to deepen our repentance for all that is amiss in ourselves; it may help to strengthen our courage and patience through all that is inevitably trying in our position, if we ponder for a little upon the law which conditions all our work—that its success brings with it inevitable perils of its own—and trace the application of this law to some of the difficulties and dangers that at this moment beset us in our task.

And, in the first place, let us see what is the danger to which the Church, as here pictured, is exposed. It is the breaking of the net, and the threatened escape of the multitude it encloses. What is this net that is in danger of breaking? Clearly it is all that outward enclosure which at any given moment surrounds the included multitude. That is to say, it represents not merely the gospel with which men first were won, nor yet the creeds and the ordinances which enclosed them when won, but the whole of that varied and complex machinery which from time to time the Church devises or acquires, by which she seeks to draw men heavenward. All such machinery of organisation and effort, as that on which we are about to consult in this our Congress; all that net work, too, of influence and association, moral and social; all those subtle and all but invisible yet mighty influences that, like so many meshes, wrap themselves round the whole life of a nation and link it to the life of the Church. All, in one word, that gives the Church a hold in any measure upon its age. The breaking of any one of these is, so far, a breaking of the net—so far a danger of the escape of just so many of the multitude as it served to attract or to restrain.

Now there can be no question that the breaking of this net is emphatically the peril of the Church in our day. If we could have any doubt of it ourselves, her enemies at least have none. They are for ever telling us, with shouts

of exultation, that the Church is fast losing her hold of the age; that she is fast ceasing to attract or to restrain it. "See," they say, "how the intellect and the free thought of the age are breaking loose from the meshes of your dogmas. See how modern science and criticism are tearing away larger and still larger portions of your creeds. See how the State is withdrawing from its old alliance with you—how the education of the nation is passing out of your control; while, on the other hand, your own internal strifes and party divisions threaten of themselves to tear you to pieces. Your net is breaking at every point, and soon the advancing tide of free thought and life will sweep away its last remaining fragments!" This is what our foes are saying; and, with all allowance for the malignant exaggerations of their hate and their hope, it has a measure of truth. There are, indeed, signs that if the net be not broken, it is strained almost to the breaking point. Is there an earnest and thoughtful worker here who, if he were asked what is the evil you most dread for the Church, what is that thought of fear which lies at this moment deepest in your heart—deep below all the cares or anxieties or sorrows of your own toil? would it not be this—"I fear the breaking of the net!" I dread, not merely the snapping of this or that smaller mesh, the failure of this or that minor organization which might be replaced by another and a better; but the breaking of it altogether—of all things I fear this. Let us look, then, this peril in the face. Let us see how far it is especially the peril of our day. Let us see whether there be in it no reasons for hope and for courage, as well as for anxiety and for fear.

And, in the first place, we observe that the net of the Church is strained and imperilled, simply because it is a net. That is, it is an instrumentality designed for the capture and restraint of unwilling captives. The Gospel of Christ Jesus answers to the deepest wants of human nature. But for that very reason it does not answer to its strongest wishes.

What humanity needs is to be saved from itself, its fallen and perverted self; what it craves is to be left to itself. It needs life, and it will not come to the life-giver. It needs light, and it loves darkness. It needs the Saviour, and it is ever praying Him to depart out of its coasts. It needs law, and it loves lawlessness. It needs discipline, and it craves indulgence. And for these reasons it resists and resents every attempt to curb its lawlessness and to restrain its licence. It struggles against each loving and constraining force that would draw it into the presence of the life-giver and the healer. Naturally, then, and necessarily this instinctive dislike of the net and of the shore leads ever the enclosed captives to rush against the restraints of faith or discipline that still draw them shoreward and heavenward.

And if the spirit of the age be, as assuredly it is, one of impatient intolerance of all restraint; if it show itself in the State, in society, in the family, in an ever increasing lawlessness; if the very idea of obedience, of submission, of reverence of any kind whatever, seems to be fast vanishing away, and in its place there be seen only the idea of the most absolute and uncontrolled self-assertion of each individual; the assertion of his natural right to do and say, in his utter selfishness, only as seems to him best, controlled only by the mere brute force of a larger number of individuals who are determined in their utter selfishness that he shall say and do only what seems to them best; if this utter lawlessness be the very characteristic of the age, why should we expect that the Church should escape its influence? The Church which is the oldest, and, therefore, according to modern thought, the most odious of all institutions; the Church which above all other institutions rests not on opinion but on authority; the Church which cannot, dare not, call the voice of the people the voice of God, but which must ever claim that the voice of the people be hushed into silence that they may hear "the word of the Lord"; the Church whose creeds and whose sacraments

are not to be reformed again and again in deference to the opinion of the hour; how is it possible that she shall not feel more than any other institution the rush and the strain of those who, drunk with licence, seek ever in the name of liberty, to destroy liberty's only safeguard—Law?

It is well for us, brethren, to remember this fact, that the Church works and must ever work against the grain of human nature. Is it well to remember this in an age where popularity is fast becoming the one and only test of success; when it is held sufficient proof that the Church has failed in her mission if her discipline be resisted or her doctrine questioned, if her services fail to draw and her sermons fail to interest; when we are assured that the only way to recover our lost ground is to "adapt ourselves to the spirit of the age;" to adapt it may be our faith to its scepticism, our discipline to its licentiousness, our teaching to its fastidious taste and palled and jaded appetites. It might be well for us to remember, aye and to say, that Christ has not sent us into the world merely to be popular, merely to dance to the piping and lament to the mourning of the children in the world's great market place; that if we are, as we are reminded so often, the followers of Him whom "the common people heard gladly," we are also the disciples of Him whose hard sayings more than once drove all his hearers away. We are the followers of Him who in the hour when in seeming helplessness He was working His mightiest work, was surrounded by the taunting crowd who challenged Him to prove His mission by doing that which would have undone it all, by coming down from the cross and saving Himself. We ought to remember, too, that we might do all we are asked to do and yet not content the world. We might only furnish fresh subjects for criticism. We remember how of old the world, that said of one teacher who came neither eating nor drinking, "he hath a devil," said of another who came eating and drinking, "behold a man gluttonous and a wine-bibber." Let us take heed; let us

take great heed, lest in our fear of the seven times heated furnace of the world's hate or the world's scorn, we bow ourselves down before its idol—popularity, what time we hear the sound of all those musical instruments with which its servants are giving signal for its worship. Let us not be too careful to answer our enemies in this matter. It may be our mission to win them from their idolatry by our faithful refusal to worship with them, by our protest for a higher worship and a purer faith. It may be our destiny, as we pass through the fire unscathed, to bring the world to own that there is no God but our God. Or if not, if still we be but faithful to our charge, if still in sternest faithfulness we utter only what our Master has given us to speak, let us remember that the Church has not always failed in her mission when she fails to attract and to conciliate; that there is another and a more awful mission that she is accomplishing in the world, when she testifies and condemns; that if the disciples fulfilled their mission, as they dwelt as welcome guests in the house where their presence brought the presence of the Son of Peace, they not the less fulfilled their awful mission when they shook the dust from their feet as they departed from the house or the city that rejected them.

But in the next place there is a peril to the net, which arises from the very zeal of those who are drawing it. So long as the net only loosely surrounds the enclosed multitudes, and no great effort is made to draw it shorewards, there is no great constraint felt, and therefore no great resistance made. But as soon as the hands of the fishermen begin to draw it closely and strongly, so soon as it restrains and constrains as well as contains, then the resistance becomes real as the restraint. There is, in fact, a double strain, that of captor and captive; the strain of those who draw strongly shoreward, and of those who rush strongly seaward. This is a peril, an inevitable peril to the net. Let us be thankful that it is one of our day. Religion is no longer, as it was in days past, a decent outward profession of

old fashioned opinions, which troubled no one because it really restrained no one. Whatever school of thought men belong to, they are at least in earnest in their belief. The dogmas of our creeds, the definitions of our articles, the words of our prayers, that men formerly repeated lazily and drowsily together, because they never thought of their meaning, are heard now as voices in their hearts, bidding them turn to the right or to the left. Old words, that in times past had faded out as if written in invisible ink, are revealing themselves anew in the glow and heat of our modern thought. The pillars of cloud are gleaming out as pillars of fire, and we are following them hither and thither. Men are beginning to lay hold of principles and work them to their results. And thus it comes, that now here, now there, some worker, some body of workers, are seizing, now this, now that part of the net, and lifting it into light as they draw it; and lifting with it, it may be, the incrustations of merely human opinion and interpretation or practice, that have grown over it; those additions to the creed which every party adds in its turn; those long tangled masses of traditional belief, that hang as dead weight to the net and sorely strain and weary the aching arms of those who seek to draw it shoreward. The result of this is a great straining of the net, a sore testing of the strength of every part that is thus drawn upon. It leads, it must lead, to one of two things—the revival of some forgotten truth, or the rejection of some forgotten error that this revival has forced into prominence; to a restoration, that is, or to a reformation. Meanwhile the net is in sad peril of being rent to pieces. This is a sore peril, but it is an inevitable one. It is a peril inherent in every revival, whether of doctrine or of practice; it is one that would be ill replaced by the rotting of the net as it hung idly in the waters, unstrained only because it was undrawn.

But there is another danger to the Church foreshadowed in this miracle—a great, and yet an inevitable one. It is that which arises from its catholicity. The net encloses a great

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multitude, and the greatness of the multitude imperils the net. So is it with the Church. It was designed from the first to enclose a great multitude, no less than the whole world, for which Christ died. "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." This is His bidding to the fishers of men. And the multitude they enclose is to be a mixed multitude. Good and bad fish within the net; wheat and tares within the field; clean and unclean within the ark. Spiritual and unspiritual, converted and unconverted, faithful and hypocrite, all are to be admitted within the enclosure of His Church, by one, and one only portal—Baptism; on one, and one only condition—outward profession of faith in that name into which they are baptised. She may not, she must not, ever narrow this condition. She must not dare to anticipate that separation of good and bad which is to be made by Him whose fan is in His hand, and who has not committed the purging of His garner to another.

But what is the result of this catholicity of the Church? It is that she is ever receiving into her bosom utterly foreign and hostile elements. A stream of foreign emigrants is ever flowing in upon her, everyone of whom becomes a citizen as he touches her shores; and yet a citizen to whom she has still to teach her language and her laws. So has it been from the first. The races, the creeds, the philosophies that the Church has enclosed within her net, threaten her, each in its turn, with some new schism, as, long after their reception each strives to break away from her restraint. The Hebrew and the Grecian converts vexed her with their murmurings. The Jew and the Gentile threatened to tear her asunder. The Heathen schools of Philosophy, the powers of the Roman State, the wild hordes of Northern barbarians, each in its turn brought within her pale, each in its turn produced its own heresy, its own attempt at schism. Each conquest proved, in its turn, a real gain, and yet a real danger. Ever the larger the multitude the greater the peril of the net. A peril this, but yet a peril that inevitably attends

success. Our real danger lies here, in attempting to avoid this danger, by narrowing the conditions of membership, by attempting to exclude from the Church all the unspiritual and the unconverted, or all that do not say the shibboleth of our own party or sect; that is, by destroying the catholicity of the Church and reducing it, as of old, to the limits of one race—the spiritual Israel now, as formerly Israel after the flesh. So surely as we do this, we hinder the progress of the Church. The net encloses little or nothing. No great multitude comes within its narrow sweep: no gathering of the nations ever strains its small contracted meshes. It is comparatively safe, because it is comparatively empty.

Such attempts at making the Church less catholic than Christ has made it have the air of spirituality, they really come from slothfulness, or from fear. From slothfulness, when we would fain make of the Church, of our parish, or our party, only a safe and quiet fold wherein the flock, small and select, obey the voice of their favorite pastor; and the pastor shuns the thought of the stormy sea, and the weary casting of the net, and the aching toil of striving with the struggling captives it encloses. It comes from fear, when the missionary, trembling for the untried strength of his net, dreading the strain upon it of a promiscuous multitude of converts, lays down conditions for their admission other than those Christ has laid; insisting upon proofs of real spiritual conversion, or even of complete conformity to Christian habits of life and thought before Baptism. Insisting, that is, that the sick shall be healed before they enter the hospital intended for their healing.

Let us beware of so doing. Let us, rather, fearlessly and faithfully accept the evil with the good, the peril with the gain. Let us remember that our net cannot be at once full and unstrained; that we cannot have at once the narrow security of the sect whose aim is to exclude, and the broad catholic fulness of the Church, whose aim is to include. We cannot have the small sharp neatness of the trim garden

that can be weeded and watered in a day; and the stately breadth and height of the forest that crowns the hills, and spreads itself far down in the valleys of the open country, and is noble and beautiful, because its growth, though not uncultivated nor unpruned, is yet largely natural and free. We must learn to listen undismayed to the reproaches cast upon our Church, that it is much divided and distracted by contending parties, or that it is full of merely worldly and unspiritual professors. It must be so, because it is national and catholic. So long as it is the Church of the whole nation, it must feel all the stir and ferment of the national life. Whatever wave of thought or feeling sweeps through the nation must deeply agitate the Church. The schools of philosophy or of religion, the social and political impulses of the nation move the Church, which influences and is influenced by each and all of them. The piety and the virtue of the nation largely find their place in her; still more largely its sin and crime. The waifs and strays of the nation that no sect will own, all belong to her. Like her master, she is still a companion of publicans and sinners. Like Him, she seeks to gather round her still the blind and the halt and the lame, that He may heal them. Others may be select because they are not catholic: she, because she is catholic, must not, dare not, be select.

There is yet another danger foreshadowed in this story. The peril to the net arises not only from the weight of the strain, but from its suddenness. The fabric that will stand the gradual strain of a great weight, snaps with the sudden jerk of a lesser one. This is a peril to which every national church is subject, because it is national. Spread, as she is, all over the nation, bound to supply all its spiritual needs as they arise, the Church is exposed to sudden strains on her resources, by all rapid changes in the distribution or even in the habits of the people. The discovery of a coal-bed, or a gold-field, the rush of some new emigration, the invention of some new art or manufacture, and the conse-

quent growth of some new hive of human industry, make from time to time fresh and sudden demands upon her strength. Suddenly, the net of some quiet country parish is filled with the influx of a great multitude; the village becomes a town, the town a city, almost in a day; and the net is strained to breaking. Or, again, some new or hitherto neglected field of labour is discovered; some class hitherto overlooked, some evil or sin or suffering that has been burrowing under the surface of society is suddenly laid bare; and the Church, by virtue of her claim to be national, is called on to deal with this and to deal with it at once; and this, too, is especially a trial which increases with success. All workers know how work brings and makes work, how each field of labour that we till brings us still to the verge of another and another; how still the sweep of our net widens and widens, and the weight it encloses tries more and more our strength, until we tremble lest it break. This, again, is a peril of our day; but a peril that is inevitable, and to be thankfully accepted as a token of success.

Such are some of the dangers arising from the very conditions of our work, perils of success rather than of failure. We are far, indeed, from saying that these are all our perils, even of this kind, or that there are not many of another kind. We are far from saying that we have not to grieve and repent for dangers caused by our own sins and our own neglects; far from saying that, as we gather here to ask for God's blessing on our Congress, our hearts should not be full of these; that as we draw nigh to His table, "the remembrance of them" should not be "grievous unto us and the burden intolerable." I would only remind you that if that prayer were to be fully answered; if from this gathering there were to come forth a Pentecost, yet that Pentecost would have its perils still; that we should still have cause to fear the breaking net, still need to beckon to each other for help. Yes! this next to our own individual repentance and awakened zeal; this is our great duty, our great safety

against the perils of our day—it is to call the partners together. As the net breaks, and wherever it breaks, there should the fishermen gather together. The point of danger should be still the point of union. Wherever the Faith is threatened with heresy, or the Church with schism, or the machinery of the Church's work proves inadequate to some sudden strain, there should the partners assemble to lay upon the net a stronger and a closer grasp; to draw it, with their united strength, ever more strongly and steadily to shore.

We beckon, then, to our partners. But who are they? What allies shall the Church call to aid her in her task? And, in the first place, there is one partner long associated with her in her task, that seems less and less disposed to hear her call. The State was once the active partner of the national Church in her great work. There was a time, when for a Christian nation, a national recognition of God was held to be a solemn duty, and to make national provision for the knowledge of His law, and the worship of His name its truest wisdom. This is so no longer. The axiom of all modern statesmanship, more and more plainly avowed, is this, that nations as nations, have nothing to do with God: that religion is the affair of the individual solely and exclusively, and one in which the State has, and ought to have, no concern whatever: that the Church—like any other voluntary association of individuals—is to be protected so long as it is peaceable, and sternly repressed whenever it grows in any way troublesome. But the idea that both Church and nation are each a divine institution—powers, each of them "ordained of God," having each their ground in real relations to God and to each other, having each their duties to each other, which they may not neglect without peril and without sin, —this is scouted as the merest folly.

I am not asking now whether this view be true or false, whether the modern idea of a godless, creedless, prayerless state be the great truth or the great heresy of the age. I only

say that its existence is a fact, and that under its influence the divorce of Church and State seems rapidly accomplishing itself all over Christendom. Men may differ, do differ as to whether this divorce between Church and State be desirable or no. All admit it to be probable. Statesmen are questioning whether the State, as they think it ought to be, can continue its union with the Church as it is. Churchmen are questioning how long the Church, as they think it ought to be, can continue its union with the State, as it is likely to be; how long the unbelieving husband may be sanctified by the believing wife, and at what point the infidelity or the cruelty of the husband may compel the wife, not indeed to seek, but with a saddened heart, to accept the putting away. To these and other questions men will give—are giving—very various answers. But all feel that while these are among the questions of our day, it is in vain for the Church to call for fresh aid from the State.

On whom else shall she call? On those other partners, still engaged in the same emprize, but whom the storms and tides of the past have drifted so far away that they are all but beyond the reach of her voice? Oh, if she could but recall these! If, without the loss of one vital truth possessed by each, if only with the lightening of each ship by the casting overboard of its evil freight of error or passion or prejudice, all these partner ships could come together once more! If, for one hour Christendom were one, what in that hour might it not achieve! Shall it ever, can it ever be, that the common peril of the breaking net, the danger of the total loss of faith from the earth, should thus unite those severed Churches and divergent sects? If this ever come, it will come, not by the adopting of each others errors, nor by the servile copying of each others defects; nor yet by agreeing to call diversity agreement and palpable schism unity. It will come by the faithful and searching reformation of each communion for itself and by itself; it will come by the turning, not of each to other, but of each and all to the common centre Christ.

Meanwhile it is our first duty to call upon our own partners—upon the members of our own Anglican Communion—to call them, not to union, we are still one, but to cooperation; to cooperation in counsel, in organization, in effort to such cooperation, to such united and organized effort as alone can cope with the perils of our day. It is here especially that our Church life needs strengthening and largely capable of it. The religious revival of this century has filled the Church with individual life. It has even revived and largely strengthened the first unit of ecclesiastical organization—parochial life. But though this is far from complete, we have hardly made a step beyond it. The higher, the larger form of organization, the life of the Diocese, of the Province, the life of the whole Church, this is but faintly beginning to stir. We are a collection of regiments, but the banding of regiments into divisions, of divisions into one great army, the power of concentrating the whole weight of the Church as one man, and throwing it collectively upon the point of need, how far have we attained to this? How far, again, have we utilised all the wealth of materials that the Church possesses in her laity? How far have we organized, and brought to bear systematically upon the vice and the sin and the sorrow of our day, the vigorous business-like aptitude of our practical laymen, or the tender might of Christian woman's love? How far have we aimed at catching and gathering into the one great central reservoir of the Church the half wasted springs of individual benevolence, and pouring them all in well directed channels to every spot that needs them? All this we have scarce begun to do. It is the work, it is the need of our day. It is the felt need that utters itself in all such gatherings for conference and counsel as these. Synods, Convocations, Congresses, all express the deep yearnings of all earnest churchmen for the completion and the manifestation of the organic life of the Church, as distinguished from the separate life of its individual members. These gatherings are the acknowledgment of that truth, for-

gotten by those who sneer at all such meetings, as assemblies for talk. They who so speak forget that even if the talk did not result, as it has resulted, in valuable action, even if conference did not bring, as it has brought, more than one practical result, the gathering is in itself a good thing, may be a very blessed thing in that Church to which He has said, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them."

And if the meeting of a Church Congress any where would be a token of this desire of unity, especially so is our meeting here, and now. The fact that the Church Congress, no longer content with giving as it has given from the first a welcome place to Irish Churchmen in its assemblies, has resolved that this year the place of its assembling shall be Ireland; the fact that this proposal came, not from Ireland but from England, that our English brethren anticipated the invitation we were hastening to offer, and the welcome we were eager to assure them of—this is a significant fact. It is a sign of that ever-growing spirit of brotherhood which every meeting of brethren generates. It is more. It is the declaration, on the part of our English brethren, of their deep and deepening conviction that we are members of a united church; united, not merely nor mainly by the outward bond of a common establishment, but by the inner and organic unity of a common life; joined together in a union which the State never made, and which the State can never therefore take away.

This were a significant fact at any time; it is tenfold more so now. Now, when our gathering occurs in so grave a crisis in the history of the united Church—the united Church we say advisedly, for the perils of the crisis are not for us alone. It is indeed a grave and an anxious moment for our common country and our common Church, that in which we are assembled. Think what men may of the causes or the merits of the struggle through which we are passing, all

must feel that its issues for good or evil must be deep and wide and lasting; that they involve the assertion of more than one great principle which, by the ruthless, resistless logic of events must work itself out to great and yet unforeseen results. Such moments of great organic change are fraught with peril both to the State and to the Church. We say to the Church as distinguished from the Establishment; for we know full well, what we are so often accused of forgetting, that neither the Establishment nor the Endowment is the Church; that her "life consisteth not in the abundance of the things that she possesseth." This is as true for the Church as it is for the individual. But it is, nevertheless, equally true for the individual as for the Church that the loss of all or most of his possessions, the sudden and violent change in all his outward circumstances and relations, must seriously try and endanger even his spiritual life. We know that at such a moment his friends will anxiously watch how he bears himself, how the life that is in him may sustain him under the shock of such a trial.

It is at such a moment—when we are threatened with such a trial—a trial which involves much more than that of loss of money only—a moment when the anxiety of suspense is even harder to bear than the trial itself may prove, should it come upon us—at such a moment, in the providence of God, you, our English brethren, have come amongst us. You have come, we love to know, to help us with your sympathy, your counsel, your prayers; come with the not unnatural desire to see and judge us for yourselves; come to watch how we bear ourselves in the presence of a danger that may one day be yours.

We bid you one and all a hearty and a loving welcome—all the more hearty and the more loving, because we believe that you represent the feelings towards us of the large majority of our English brethren. We believe, we know, that it is not in their hearts, any more than it is in yours, to watch in coward and selfish security, from your harbour of

present safety the perils and the efforts of your brethren caught in the storm and struggling with the waves; to note with sneering critiscism how, as they toil against the storm, their movements have not all the exact order, nor their voices quite the measured calm their critics can boast of; to scoff at their sea craft; to exult over their breaking net. You have come, if but for a moment, to take your place beside us; to lay your hands in brotherly love upon our net, and to understand, as you do so, how, if it be in no peril of breaking from the multitude it encloses, it may be so from the strength of the currents and the violence of the tides it contends with. You come to learn from us how it is that we have toiled so long and won so little; come to hear how ours has been no favourable night for toil; not calm, and still, and warm, like the eastern night of those first fishermen, but rather like one of our own northern nights, wild and tempestuous, lit but by the lightening flashes of civil and religious strife. You have come to hear that if we have won few, we have lost none; come to see that we have not and will not cease to toil, but still, as our Lord commands us, are ready to labour on, spent yet undismayed.

One thing you will not hear from us. You will hear no unmanly cries of terror, nor of rage; no weak entreaties for compassion. Nay, rather you are come to hear us tell you in all brotherly kindness this, that if we need your help, you, too, need ours—need it as really, if not as much as in those old days when ours was the fulness, and yours the need; when England sought and found from Ireland missionaries to help her to win her heathen population to the Gospel. Now it is otherwise. Ours is now the weakness, yours the strength; and, therefore, yours the especial perils of success; yours far more than ours the perils of the breaking net. The very smallness of our numbers, the very strength and number of our enemies keep us a compact and homogeneous body. There are perils, therefore, to which you are exposed, from which we are free. There

are aspects, therefore, of truth, there are developments of Catholic life, which are given to us to bring out, as there are others given to you. We have our share, our important and essential share, in the development of the life of the Church catholic, as you have yours. You must be helped by our spiritual life, hurt by our spiritual weakness. Let us hope and pray that we may each more and more understand and realize this fact. Let us hope and pray that as year by year the action of each of these portions of the Church on the other grows clearer and stronger, that we shall come, each one, more readily and closely to the help of the other, and learn to know and love each other better. Let but this spirit animate us; let but our hearts glow with a still deeper and more loving brotherhood, springing from that out of which alone it can spring—from closer union with our common Lord and deeper longing to do His work on earth—and there is no fear that our work shall ever perish. The storm may rage, and the black clouds gather, and the waves run high, but there shall ever reveal itself more and more distinctly, the form of Him who came of old, walking on the wild waters, to the aid of his imperilled disciples. We shall see Him still, though it were but by the storm-light upon the deep. Amidst the roar of the elements, we shall still hear Him say, "It is I, be not afraid." Nearer and nearer still, through the gloom of the tempest, shall grow the shore where we shall draw our nets to land and hear His welcome, at whose command we first, in fear and yet in faith, launched out into the deep, and let down our nets for the draught.

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